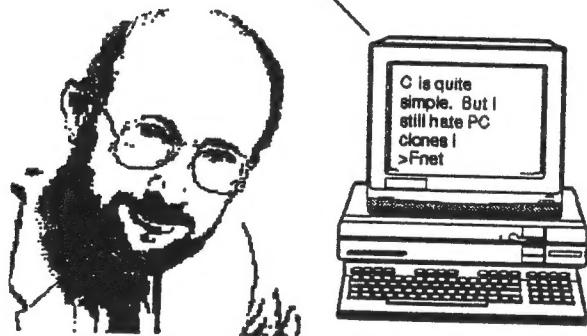
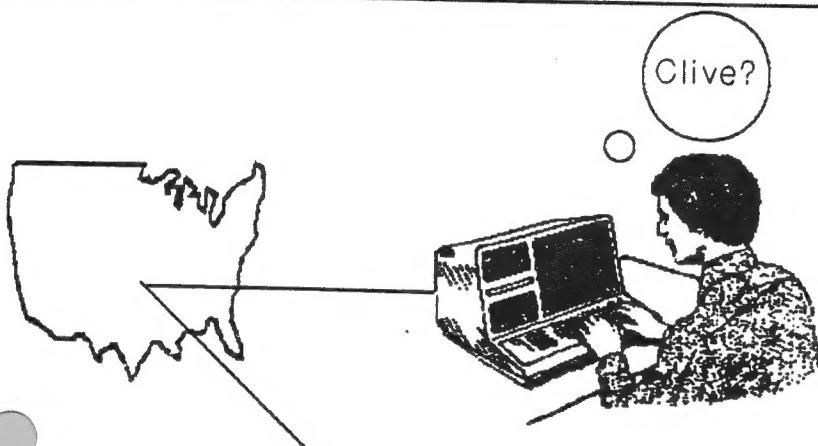


THE RAMTOP™

Jan/Feb

1989

Published By The Greater Cleveland Sinclair/Timex/Generic Computer Users Group



This Month: Fnet: A World in it Self.....

Club Notes:

Jan:

-John Kazor gives C demo

Feb:

-Doug Gillespie demo's his phone book program

East Side Group meets at The Euclid Square Mall
In the Euclidian Room 7:30 PM
Every first Friday each month
Contact: Max Schoenfeld (216)-371-1096

West Side Group meets at Lakewood Public Library
15425 Detroit Ave. Lakewood Ohio 7:00 PM
Every third Friday each month
Contact: Dick Sieg (216)-433-4387



A short note to our friends from other newsletters and magazines. You are welcome to use any of our material, news, adds, or programs if YOU: 1) Tell where it came from (RAMTOP Cleveland, Ohio) and 2) The author's name that wrote the article. We would appreciate it if you would send us a copy of the newsletter that it appeared in! We will do the same.

Dec/Jan/Feb Editorial

C. Montgomery

During a November club meeting I was preparing to demonstrate some new software for the QL when my monitor stole the show. Apparently, finding a good quality color display for the QL or 2068 is not easy, especially for a reasonable price.

The display I use is a high resolution RGB Mitsubishi monitor, easily capable of displaying the QL's full resolution and color. An RGB capable 2068 will work just as well. It's an industrial grade monitor that will easily outlive the computer. The display is rock steady with incredible contrast and sharpness. No jitters, no blurring, no overscan. How much did I pay? Just ninety dollars. It arrived on my doorstep completely QL compatible and ready to go. I've owned it for a year without a single problem.

Mark Fischer sells these monitors for a variety of computers, and each is covered by his own personal guarantee for life. There is a catch - these monitors do not have cases. Mark has replaced any components that could ever possibly fail. Some do have phosphor burn, though relatively very little. Depending on the amount of burn, they vary in price from seventy to one-hundred and fifty dollars, the most expensive ones being in mint condition. In addition, he is selling monochrome amber and green screens (also in complete working order) for a little more than cost of shipping. These, however, have neither a case nor a chassis.

Mark has asked that any purchases from our Cleveland group go through me for the sake of convenience. I may be contacted at (216) 759-3702 (4 to 9 pm please), or by mail at:

C. Montgomery
Xiph Computing
4540 Park Street
Liberty Twp. OH
44425-3327

Here it is the beginning of February already! Can you believe it? I don't know where the time has flown! I have had more interest in the digitizer for the 2068. I saw in the Dec. issue of SMUG (Sinclair Milwaukee Users Group) P.O. Box 101 Butler, WI, 53007 that they are going to SELL A BOARD, PARTS, and DOCUMENTATION to allow you to DIGITIZE A VIDEO! Write to them for more details. I plan to so I will report to you as soon as I get a reply.

We have elected a NEW PRESIDENT and EAST SIDE VICE PRESIDENT. TOM SIMON IS our new president and TOBY RADLOFF is our new East Side vice president. We had out Christmas party and auction with its usual success. We hope you had a GREAT holiday season!

We plan to have new and renewed interest in our Sinclair systems this year! You saw in the last couple issues the nicer print. I will remain editor but Chris Raynak and Ron Lutz are going to now become involved to help take some of the load from me. This will benefit you, the reader since we will hopefully be on time and have more use of Desk Top Publishing. (Maybe Chris or Ron can give a seminar on this subject, hint-hint!)

We also plan to have more seminars and projects going on at the meetings. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO GIVE A SEMINAR OR A TALK ON ANY SUBJECT RELATED TO OUR COMPUTERS, PLEASE GIVE TOM SIMON A CALL OR EITHER OF OUR VICE PRESIDENTS:

Tom Simon: 928-7910

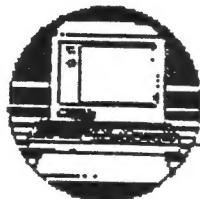
Toby Radloff: 429-1191 (East)

Doug Gillespie: 884-8835 (West)

You may also UPLOAD your articles and/or news to our BBS: TIMELINES: 671-6922 10pm-6am EST. We NEED your support to keep our group alive and well! We all tend to get "lazy" and let the other guy do the work but if we all take this attitude, our group will fall by the wayside mighty quick! I am looking forward to a new and ACTIVE year! James G. DuPau

The World of The Fnet

by
Chris Ravnak



Introduction

A long time ago, we Sinclair users were introduced to the world of telecommunications. A few of you will remember the early Byte Back modem. But many more of you are familiar with the Westridge 2050 modem. With the dawn of communication between our Sinclair computers, we had visions of exchanging programs and mail with our fellow users. However, the software lacked the ability to transfer programs, and there was no redial function for the modem. Since that time, many users have forgotten about their 2050's and many more have lost the vision of communications. That is until now. A lot has happened since those early years, and many new products have come out. Adaptor cards (such as the Z10) that let you connect your 2068 or QL to more powerful modems; now exist. Better software such as Qlink and QLTerm give you control you thought you would never have. But this is all hardware on the user end. For a successful connection to another system, and something useful out of the deal, yet more is still needed. That is where Fnet comes in.....

The first BBS's.....

Some six to seven years back, I started my first BBS. It was supposed to be the do all and end all of BBS's and I thought it would give all Timex users what they wanted. I was very surprised to find out that only the most limited of functions were possible with 16K available, and no real control over the modem. Then I built up what must have become the biggest monstrosity in BBS history, The TSU BBS version 10.00. It was a composition of two enemy computer systems (commodore and atari) 8 disk drives two modems and one very tired System Operator (SYSOP). But even with this set up, few users called in, and those

that did were usually out of state (my hat goes off to Steve Ishii who somehow managed to call from CA every other day). I found out to my surprise that the cost was so ridiculously high to call my system from our Cleveland group, that, that was the reason I did not hear from anyone! So I started to check into getting a Cleveland line at the request of our users.

Money \$\$\$

It didn't take us too long to realize that a Cleveland line was out of the question. The figures for the project were numerous, but the bottom line was about half the price of a new car! During all this, I was going to another computer group, the IBM PC group and hearing about things like Vnet and FIDO, but no one ever seemed to explain what it was nor did they try to. They just liked to use it as a new buzz word to make it sound like the hundreds they had poured into their machines was somehow now justified to their wives who were happy that they new how to say Vnet. Anyway, I never did find out what that one meant, but I did find out what FIDO represented.

FIDO : The early years.....

FIDO is a method and a means by which many computers can link up and exchange data, not unlike xmodem transfers between two computers. What usually happened, was you left a message at point A and it got bundled together with a whole group of other messages on disk to go to point B. This disk was then either mailed to another computer via US mail, or transferred over the phone occasionally to another computer by the modem. When I heard this I was very excited, and wanted to just jump right into FIDO. Only problem was, I found that to run a FIDO bulletin board program you pretty much needed a big system (\$3000 or \$4000 worth) and it was a very confused and slow system of sending messages. Many times it would take weeks for an intended message to get where

it was going, and yet weeks more to get a reply. Many system operators began to select their own node numbers (a node is a number which identifies a particular computer system, for example to say Timelinez BBS is node 2, which it is not). As a result, programmers had to add a net number to group nodes together. So, besides having to remember which node number some system was identified with you had to remember the net number as well. These systems also did not give you any listing of who was where, so you just had to rely on your local SYSOP to provide you with the information. This has led to the current state of affairs of the FIDO system. It is no wonder that not many use it. And then came the release of the Fnet.....

Fnet Explained

Fnet was introduced with the coming of a BBS program called FoRem. FoRem is designed to work with both IBM PC's (Clones) and Atari ST computers. A program called an Fmailer operates within the FoRem BBS program as a subprogram that is loaded into the computer system. At a specific time of day, FoRem is told by the Fmailer program to log off all users and begin calling other FoRem BBS's running the Fmailer. The time is usually set up in the late evening or early AM hours when BBS traffic is lighter. The specific Bulletin Boards that the Fmailer calls as well as the exact time is set up by the SYSOP. When the Fmailer calls out, the sequence goes something like this:

Calling Out BBS

Waiting BBS

Are you running the-----> Answer: Yes/
Fmailer? <----- No.
Sending your mail -----> Store mail
Can I send mail for -----> Give list of
other BBS's through BBS's that I
you? <----- will accept
Send other BBS mail -----> Store mail
Do you have any mail -----> Send mail
for me or for other <-----
BBS's I call?
Hang up & Hang up

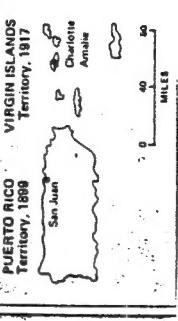
Please note that the text used here is not actually sent by the mailer but is provided in this form so you get an idea of how it works.

If you examine this format you can see that quite a lot of information is exchanged. The mailer compresses the data into "packets" to increase speed, and the average call only last a few minutes!

During this exchange, Email (personal messages), messages from all bases, and Fmail (programs with messages attached) are transferred. The last item noted is a major difference of FIDO vs Fnet. FIDO only transfers messages. Also, if a calling out BBS picks up messages for another system, it usually delivers those messages along with its own the same night. Most FIDO systems wait till a "quota" of messages is reached before it will call. Unlike FIDO, Fnet node numbers (the numbers that identify whose computer is whose) are controlled. This control is in the form of a key data file, that the author of the fmailer, David Chiquelin, mails to you once you pay him his \$10.00 shareware fee for the mailer program. So far with the experience I have had with Dave, he is one of the most supportive shareware programmers I have run across. You get much more than your \$10.00 in support alone. In fact, Dave even encourages you to write your own mailer for other computers (perhaps the QL?) for use with their BBS programs. He does this by providing all the technical documentation on the exact operation of the mailer. I would be more than happy to send this to anyone for their examination. Dave does require however, that if you do intend to use the mailer you create with the existing Fnet nodes that you send a \$10.00 fee to him. As it pays for the key you receive and maintains control of the Fnet node numbers, which is pretty cheap organization.

Who can I reach???

If you look on the next page you will see a map of the US. It shows some of the computer systems the TSU is in touch with. An example of how one message gets from my node, 400 to say node 7 in Florida would go like this (follow along on the map); I call node 399 in Denver, he calls node 174, node 174 calls node 5 in Denver and then node 7 in Florida calls node 5. That sounds pretty screwy doesn't it? You probably saying, "Why not just call node 7?". Well there are two good reasons for that. 1) node 7 is not PC Persuit-able. Most Fnet systems use PC Persuit (a local pay service that allows local connect charges for computer to computer long distance calls) to cut down on their phone bills. Not all cities are accessible through PC Persuit, but many have PC Persuit lines which you can dial out from only (like me!). 2) Some nodes have very heavy traffic at night and are almost impossible to connect with. Routes were in place before you started to use Fnet with your bbs, so you have to connect to them in an orderly manner. Remember, most of the mail that is sent "VIA" another bbs gets to its destination overnight. Also, inbetween calling all these nodes, the Fmailer waits 30 seconds between each call so any nodes trying to call it can get connected.



Hawaii Aug. 21, 1959

Alaska Jan. 3, 1959

Texas Dec. 29, 1845

Arkansas June 15, 1865

Florida Mar. 3, 1845

North Carolina Nov. 21, 1789

South Carolina May 23, 1789

Georgia Jan. 2, 1788

Connecticut Jan. 9, 1798

Massachusetts Feb. 6, 1788

Rhode Island May 29, 1790

Pennsylvania Dec. 12, 1787

Delaware Dec. 7, 1787

New Jersey Dec. 18, 1787

New Hampshire June 21, 1788

Vermont Mar. 4, 1791

Maine Mar. 15, 1820

Idaho July 3, 1890

Oregon Feb. 14, 1859

Washington Nov. 11, 1889

Utah Jan. 4, 1896

Wyoming July 10, 1890

Montana Nov. 8, 1889

North Dakota Nov. 2, 1889

South Dakota Nov. 2, 1889

Minnesota May 11, 1858

Wisconsin May 20, 1848

Michigan Jan. 26, 1837

Lake Superior

Lake Michigan

Lake Huron

Lake Erie

Lake Ontario

Lake Champlain

Lake Superior

Lake Michigan

Lake Huron

Lake Erie

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How To Use The Fnet.....

To use the Fnet, you must first find a bbs that is running FoRem. For our Cleveland users group, this would be MegaVision's BBS. At first I had told our group that Mega IV would be supporting FoRem, but it was brought to my attention that Mega IV has gone offline. I have had a few conversations with MegaVision's Sysop, and he has agreed to let us use his system's fnet powers to our benifit. What can this do for you? Well, I have already identified two Canadian Users Groups that use the Fnet system, and if you leave a general message to a few of the Canadian Nodes I am sure you can get a response. Also, you now have direct access to TSU bbs files! Just tell me the file you want, and I can fnet it to MegaVision in care of your user name. But I am getting ahead of myself. First off, the number for MegaVision is 441-3816. His system is considered node 396. Log onto his system and apply for a password. Leave a message to the Sysop, stating that you are part of a user group and wish to have Fnet access to contact nodes in the Fnet. A Sysop usually takes about 3 to 4 days to validate new users so please be patient.

When you call back there is a certain sequence that is required to use the Fnet. If you wish to send personal mail to another node (like the TSU) you must do the following:

- 1) Log on the bbs with your name (or user ID) and password.
- 2) Read the bulletins you wish, then type Q to get to the main FoRem menu.
- 3) At the main FoRem menu type E followed by the ENTER key. You will see a message saying that you can:
 - send Fmail
 - read mail
 - send mail
 - quit to main menu

Each of these will be explained in turn. If you wish to:

Send Mail:

Selecting this will cause the prompt TO: to appear. You must type FNET. The system will respond with "Enter node number or ? to search". If you wish to send an email message to the TSU you would enter 400. If you wish to see what nodes you can send mail to, use the search option.

Once you have entered the node number you will get another TO prompt. The system now wants to know the user you wish to send the mail to. Enter the user's name. The rest is pretty much standard for any bbs message entry. Just use the FoRem help menus by typing /H.

Send Fmail:

What is Fmail? Well Fmail is a personal message with a file attached (File+mail=Fmail). Say Greg Dupuy our newsletter editor wants an article for the Ramtop and you have one for him (boy wouldn't that make him happy!). But you live in Houston, TX and do not want to mail a tape to him. Well, just fmail it! The system will prompt you for the file name you want to upload. Enter it and select the proper protocol. After uploading it you will get a TO prompt. Enter Fnet and follow the same procedure as for an Email message. (Note: after you upload the file you will be allowed to enter the message that is to be sent along with your file).

Read mail

If you get a message that you have Fmail waiting or Email, you can get both this way. If it is Fmail, you will see the message that came with the file first, and then be told how many days you have to read the file before it is deleted.

The message bases also work with the fnet. You send messages the same way as you did in Email, except everybody on the node you are sending them to will be able to see them.

Concluding Comments and Special Functions:

There are a few functions which some Sysops may let you use. It depends on how big a system they are running. One is the list function the other is the ALL function. Both can be used in different combinations. With list after typing Fnet at the TO prompt, you would type LIST at the node prompt. Then just type in as many node numbers as you want to receive the same message or fmail and press ENTER when done. ALL will send a message to ALL nodes at the node prompt. You could also use the List or ALL prompt again at the second TO prompt for the same effect. I will be bring a few copies of a users guide for fnet for those of you that have not gotten one yet, but use this as your guide. Through both Fnet and FIDO we can establish the Great American Users Group BBS net for ALL Timex/Sinclair Users to keep in touch. So drop me a line at node 400 and lets see what we can get going! Its up to you.....0/0

New Life for the QL.



QL to run MS-DOS 3.2

Don Walterman uploaded the following message to Timelines...BBS: Data Line No. 216-671-6922 Hours of Operation 10 PM to 6 AM Eastern Standard Time.

Digital Precision has just announced an MS-DOS emulator for the Sinclair QL. Sharps will have it in 2 months. Initial cost will be about \$150. Requirements will be memory expansion and disk drive/s. Two versions will be available (MS-DOS 3.2) and (PC-DOS 4.0). Supports Com1 and Com2 mapped to SER1 and SER2. Also supported will be LPT1. DP says it will run all well behaved programs that do not make direct calls to the hardware around the BIOS like some games. More details available from Sharps. Also available in January, the QL Hard Disk I/F with 20 Mega Byte Disk Drive. Literature says it attaches to the ROM Port. Ask Sharps for more information.

That is all that he said about it in his message. I can see what this will mean to QL computer users due to the limited supply of software written for the QL. I also have a Tandy 1000 and hundreds of software programs in the MS-DOS format from the Public Domain. All of them were simply down-loaded and un-archived. This will, I hope, mean that QL users with modems will be able to use the public domain terminal programs for the I.B.M. DOS machines. I hope that we will be able to use the ARC and PKXARC archiving and un-arching file utilities that the I.B.M. and it's clone users use. I like the idea of being able to use PC-Write a public domain word processor instead of Quill on my QL.

This will mean new life for the QL and make available new uses for the orphaned machine. Of course this all depends on how compatible the emulator makes the QL to I.B.M. DOS and programs written to run on machines that use MS-DOS.

There are literally thousands of programs on Bulletin Board Systems all over the country to be had for the price of a phone call. There are at least 20 MS-DOS BBS'S in the Cleveland area that are a local call. Half of these charge nothing to belong to as a user. The others charge from \$10.00 to \$20.00. Believe me that if you have to pay to join, the first piece of information that you got that helped you under-



LOOK OUT CLONES!

stand or operated a modem, printer or software package or the first utility file or program that you will use or like, will be worth the membership fee. Whatever you are interested in whether it's E-Mail, MIDI, Desktop Publishing, Word Processing, Games, Utilities, Data Base Management, Artificial Intelligence or getting super Telecomm Package to use your modem with, it's out there. It's on one of those many I.B.M. BBS's just waiting for you to list the file get the name, download it and un-archive. The best part is that you never have to leave the comfort of your home to buy stamps, buy foreign money exchange orders, mail order from England; etc., to be able to use and enjoy your QL.

Of course this all hangs on how much the QL using the emulator will be compatible with such things as terminal software written for MS-DOS machine and its support circuitry and hardware. This also applies to the way some word processors write to the screen on I.B.M. MS-DOS machines. I hope that we won't see any major draw backs. I hope that the funny way the QL handles I/O (Input/Output) on its non standard serial ports does not cause it to hang up or lock up. They are standard in a way and not in the way that Sinclair makes them work but are in the way they operate. They tend to hang up or lock up or hinder inputs and output. I have had to put up with making a ram disk drive in memory to be able to download because of this. It will upload off of disk drive or micro drives but hangs up on downloading my Camana Disk Drive Controller.

Another draw back may be in speed reduction. The QL runs at about 7.5 Mhz and earlier models of I.B.M. and clones run at 4.7 Mhz. My Tandy 1000 at 4.7 Mhz seems to be as fast as the QL. Now if the QL takes half the processing time to translate to MS-DOS running the emulator program as a job, this leaves us with 3.75 Mhz clocking to run your program in I.B.M. DOS, does it use more time to do it, or less? Will I.B.M. DOS programs for the 8088 at 4.7 Mhz run just as fast on the QL using the emulator or will the QL be slower than it? Will the barrels roll down just as fast on the QL using the I.B.M. Emulator as they do in the I.B.M. MS-DOS version of Donkey Kong running on my Tandy 1000 clone? Will they be so fast that I can never win, or so slow that I can lose?

The above was only to point out how many questions we all must have, who might consider buying the emulator. I would need to know more about it before buying it. By: Robert Paris

